



BY KHURRAM HUSAIN

Quagmire or adjustment?

A SERIES of articles in this newspaper have highlighted the state of affairs in different sectors of industry, mostly manufacturing, and the picture that is emerging is not a pretty one. Here is a snapshot of what people in industry are telling us.

Sales were dropping all last fiscal year, in some cases by almost 50 per cent. All manufacturers reported booming sales in the few years preceding FY2018, then a sudden drop in FY2019 that ended in June. In the first two months of the current fiscal year, since the new budget went into effect, they report further contractions of around 30pc.

How large is 30pc? Consider this: if a manufacturer finds a sales slump by 30pc in a given month, he or she has to slow down production or allow inventory to pile up. If the latter course is taken, and the next month also sees a continuing sales slump of equal magnitude, the size of the inventory will pile up. In three months the manufacturer may well be sitting on inventory levels close to one month worth of production. At this point a decision will have to be taken: should the firm continue producing or shut down and focus on moving its inventory out?

This is what is happening in autos, to take one example. Notice the ads appearing in the papers promising instant delivery of your car upon payment. Even six months ago, you would have had to wait many months to get delivery of your car. Today they're practically standing outside the showroom dangling the car keys at passersby, saying "it's yours, take it against payment".

They also announced curtailment of production, shutting down their assembly lines for 10 to 12 days out of a month. This is because inventories are piling up as customers disappear. It's the same in cement, though perhaps not as severe yet, as well as in steel, tiles and ceramics. Other manufacturers have more resilient demand for their products, like edible oil as one example. Here they are finding out that the consumer is increasingly buying smaller packets of cheaper brands, so those serving the upper ends of the market are seeing demand shift away from their products towards those on the cheaper side, who are seeing a smaller slowdown but much of the demand coming for

smaller packets.

Tractors and trucks are in the same position, seeing something like a 30pc drop in sales in the opening months of this fiscal year after having suffered a near 50pc drop in the last fiscal year. What appeared to be a near catastrophic collapse in demand last year is now intensifying across the board.

Different sectors and firms give different reasons for why they are facing these difficulties. Some point to high interest rates and exchange rate depreciation. Others say purchasing power in the markets they serve has collapsed so rapidly that

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demand has practically dried up. Yet others say their vendor and distributor networks have been disrupted by the government's documentation drive. Others point to the near halt in government development spending which was a major source of demand for them, such as cement and steel.

For the economist, it is of course a combination of these. All of the elements that business leaders are pointing to as the source of their ailment are part of a package of policies that economists call macroeconomic adjustment.

But all the business leaders agree on one thing: the brunt of the 'adjustment' is being borne by the daily wage earners. Thus far, they tell us, they are not laying people off (though I take this with a pinch of salt; there are surely layoffs happening but the pace has not yet reached its peak), but what they are doing to cut costs is not hiring as many daily wage

earners as they used to. A quick stop at a couple of locations where daily wage earners wait for work will reveal sheer desperation. If you're in the mood for a real education on what is happening, go to one of these locations and ask the daily wagers who will crowd around you what they think of 'naya Pakistan'. And listen carefully to what they say.

Large-scale industry shutdowns have not yet happened, even though those who have the option to shut down their production line in parts are certainly slowing their output. But three months of sustained 30pc declines will get you to a point where large-scale shutdowns could become imminent. And with those shutdowns come large-scale layoffs. We are already two months into the adjustment, with September being the third, so unless something changes drastically, things are going to become more difficult by October, and even more so going forward.

The picture is one of the toughest I have seen in a decade. The only other time I can recall something like this was in the aftermath of the great crash of 2008. Many businessmen were opting to set fire to their factories and take what they could get from insurance rather than continue ploughing ahead and handing over most of what they earned to their creditors. There was a spiral in the portfolio of non-performing loans held by the banks in those days as one after another enterprise opted for default. And then came the factory fires.

We are not there yet, far from it. And it is worth reminding everyone that the situation was inevitable given the scale of the imbalances inherited by the government. But did it need to be as bad as it is? Given that large jolts will have to be administered to the economy, was it necessary to aggravate the situation with confrontations, runaway 'accountability' that has stalled all decision making (even the government's own, it would appear, going by the unseemly flip flop we've just seen on the GIDC ordinance), and the rewarding of incompetence? The country does not deserve this. ■

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BY I. A. REHMAN

No power is unfettered

The government's sole defence was that it enjoyed the requisite power to recall the judges.

THE mystery surrounding the removal of three judges of special courts remains unresolved and is throwing up critical questions about the government's respect for the rule of law.

The reversion of the three judges last month to their previous positions might not have attracted much attention if two of them, Mushtaq Elahi and Naeem Arshad, had not been hearing, as judges of accountability courts, cases against the Sharifs, and the third judge, Masood Arshad, had not been hearing the narcotics case against Rana Sanaullah.

The defence lawyers in the last mentioned case shouted 'foul' and so did the PML-N. What fuelled unsavoury speculation was the fact that the narcotics court judge was about seven months short of completing his three-year term, and the accountability court judges had been appointed only 70 days earlier, and that no reason was given for their removal except for the federal law ministry's authority to take the action under reference.

For some time, it was not clear whether the law ministry had consulted the chief justice of the Lahore High Court on whose recommendation these judges had been posted to special courts. An explanation in bad taste was that a message had been sent to the LHC on Aug 26 and that it should have reached the chief justice.

Later on, it was revealed that the law ministry had informed the LHC in July 2019 about the judges' reversion, and it was only after its concurrence a month later that the action against the three judges was notified. Whether any reasons were conveyed to the chief justice of the LHC is not known. There is no indication either that the judges concerned were given the right to hearing. The government's sole defence of its action was that it enjoyed the requisite power to recall the judges.

The government position reminds one of the advice William Makepeace Thackeray, a contemporary of Charles Dickens, had given to young novelists. It was possible, he said, that the central character in a plot died after being hit by a brick that accidentally fell from a roof while he was passing through a lane, but it was advisable not to build a plot around such accidents. The advice is valid for all official spokespersons who justify

government actions on the sole ground that they were taken by competent authorities. They are not bothered about the question of whether the government's authority has been legitimately exercised or about the fact that no state functionary has unfettered powers.

But citizens with long memories are assailed by doubts about the government's refusal to explain its motives. The case of justice Sheikh Aftab Husain comes to their mind. He was in the good books of General Ziaul Haq for having authored the LHC judgment that awarded the death sentence to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. He was made chief justice of the Federal Shariat Court. When Gen Zia learnt that he was going to give a verdict about *rajam* (death by stoning) that was not in accord with the dictator's version of Islam, justice Aftab Husain was summarily transferred to a high-sounding clerical position in a federal ministry. The sole explanation for one of the most blatant violations of the judiciary's dignity and independence was this: Gen Zia had the power to send the chief justice of the FSC packing.

It will be in the government's own interest if a satisfactory explanation for the summary repatriation of the three special courts judges can be offered.

If the possibility of the government's discovery that the three judges had somehow rendered themselves liable to withdrawal from their assignments is examined even in passing, a host of questions about the selection of such judges, the system of overseeing their performance and the value of their judgments will arise that might not be easily answerable.

The use of power to decide matters arbitrarily is also exercised in other departments of governance. The most striking example is the jail authorities' denial of access to prisoners.

Lahore's Joint Action Committee for People's Rights is an alliance of 33 civil society organisations, including such highly reputed entities as AGHS, Ajoka, Minorities' Alliance, ASR, Aurat Foundation, CSJ, DCHD, Digital Rights Foundation, HRCP, Sahe, Shirkat Gah, Simorgh, SAP-PK, WAR, WAF and Women Workers Helpline. The committee wrote to the superinten-

dent of the Haripur Central Prison expressing concern about the conditions of detention there and seeking permission to "visit the jail and meet the detainees, especially Mohsin Dawar MNA and Ali Wazir MNA..."

The prison head won a point by replying promptly, but permission for a visit to the jail was declined. He wrote: "It is intimated that the PTM activists are confined under 3 MPO in this jail hence you cannot meet them according to the rules. Moreover, the jailed MNAs Mohsin Dawar and Ali Wazir are also charged in anti-state activities hence they are governed under Rule 723(viii) & 723(xiii) of Pakistan Prisons Rules. According to the said rules the prisoners have to submit a list of their friends and relatives who they want to meet. Since the prisoners in question did not mention you in their list hence you are not allowed to meet the said prisoners."

"Rest [assured?] the prisoners in question are treated humanely and in accordance with law. Their rights as prisoners are not infringed upon as alleged in your letter."

The jail superintendent can't be blamed for going by the instructions given to him. But his superiors have missed the possibility of getting their regime of "humane" treatment of the detainees endorsed by a representative civil society alliance. What is the harm in letting the people know how well the detainees are treated? Reliance is placed on rules that give officials the power to reject public demands.

These rules are bent literally every day to suit the government's expedience — and often unjustifiably. If rules and authority are interpreted in the interest of increasing public oversight of the use of government authority, it could increase citizens' faith in the government's democratic credentials and its respect for the rule of law.

It is certainly time to end the prison authorities' absolute and completely indefensible power to deny access to the prisoners/detainees by resuscitating the system of independent, non-official visitors and allowing parliamentarians, bar associations and well-established civil society organisations to periodically visit jails several times a year. ■



Divide and bleed

KING Solomon has just reason for regret. His humane decision has been perverted by two modern mothers — India and Pakistan, each claiming the same child. Both countries are witnessing it being torn asunder. Jammu & Kashmir deserved a better parent.

By revoking Article 370 and Article 35A of its constitution, India had hoped to resolve the issue of held Kashmir decisively. It has done so instead ruthlessly and callously. Prime Minister Modi's government and Indian parliamentarians decided that half a carcass was better than a whole one. That decision was taken a month ago, on Aug 5. Despite India's attempts to embalm it in the formaldehyde of cosmetic diplomacy, that half-carcass (much to India's discomfort) has begun to decompose.

Many nations — more for their own interests than India's — ignore the reek. They have accepted against their conscience that the action taken by India should be regarded as its 'internal matter'. Who among them can resist the power of 21st century politico-economics?

India has claimed victory internally but faces defeat internationally. The United Nations and now the European Union have cleared their tables to make room for a discussion on Jammu & Kashmir. India tried but has failed to sweep human rights abuses in held Kashmir under a bloodied Kashmiri shawl.

Force of habit has made Pakistan regard every Indian setback as an advantage. Such 'successes' are Pyrrhic in nature. Foreign policy expects stronger foundations. Recent pronouncements by the Pakistan government, while dramatic in their declarations, need to be tempered with tact. The use of the words 'Nazism' and 'Holocaust' arouse memories that lie too deep for tears among nations which suffered both. The darker connotations of Nazism were accentuated particularly after the defeat of Hitler's Germany. The word 'Holocaust' predates World War II. It has roots in the mass murder of Protestants in 16th century Netherlands, and in atrocities committed by Turks in the 1920s. However, time has not diluted their potency. They should be uncorked carefully.

In the past few weeks, there has been a curious inversion of postures in New Delhi and in Islamabad. Indian defence minister Rajnath Singh hinted broadly (the breadth of a nuclear warhead) that India will reconsider its nuclear strike option. It is prepared to strike first. Prime Minister Imran Khan has said that Pakistan won't initiate a military conflict. The common man is finding it hard to distinguish between peaceable hawks and aggressive doves.

This sort of shadow-boxing was a feature

of US-Soviet relations until the collapse of the Soviet Union under the weight of its military pretensions. US president Ronald Reagan upped the ante by elevating the debate into the cosmos with his Star Wars doctrine. The Soviet Union had managed to launch the first dog, the first man and then the first woman into space. It could not afford to combat the United States in outer space.

India has the same advantage that the US did. Its economy has the resources and the resilience to arm itself without having to examine the bill. For India, Pakistan is an irritant, a nuisance, but not a competitor. Its true rival — economically, diplomatically, strategically — is a militarised China. In the Eurasian zone, three countries are determined to retrieve territory history forced them to forfeit — Russia, its satellite states; China, the island of Formosa; and India, the Indus plateau from which it derived its name.

Interestingly, of late, PM Modi has changed tack in his recent speeches. In them, he addresses the people of Pakistan.

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He exhorts them to question their leaders and to demand explanations from them why India is progressing so rapidly and Pakistan is palpably not. Insidiously, he is inserting a stiletto between the Pakistani public and its leadership. He is attempting to extract a dividend from the dissatisfaction Pakistanis are feeling (and expressing) at the failure of the PTI government to govern.

Anyone with sense knows that India and Pakistan are not equals. They also admit the truth that India cannot annex Pakistan. It does not need over 200 million more ungovernable Muslims. That is why in 1971 it preferred the creation of Bangladesh rather than have a reunified Bengal. And it cannot incinerate Pakistan in a nuclear conflict without singeing itself. Pakistan cannot compete indefinitely with India's plans to improve its defence superiority. At best, Pakistan can use, as it has done in the past, operational expertise to correct the technical imbalance.

What should both countries do? The only answer is a mature, reasoned and arms-less dialogue without preconditions from either side. The mothers must talk. Even King Solomon would find no cause to regret such a judgement. ■



'Islamist militants'

RECENTLY, a *Dawn* reader reacted strongly to the words "Islamist militants" appearing in the caption of a picture about Sri Lanka. The reader said it was "painful" to see "the word 'Muslim' or 'Islam' with any terror group".

Before we dwell on 'Islamist' and 'Islamic', let us note that the conscientious objector is factually wrong, because the caption spoke of 'militants' and not 'terrorists'. While the latter is an abhorrent phenomenon, the word 'militant' under given circumstances could be an objective term, because a militant could be fighting for a cause which he may believe to be just. Civilians may fall victim to what is called collateral damage, but a paladin doesn't believe in targeting civilians as a matter of policy, as terrorists do — 9/11, 7/7, APS Peshawar, Eid prayers, *taraweesh* congregations, Shia mosques, churches, concerts and nightclubs.

Mustafa Akyol, one of Turkey's leading intellectuals, responded to my request to throw light on the word 'Islamist'. Author of the path-breaking book *Islam without Extremism*, Akyol says 'Islamist' is "an accurate and also helpful term, because it helps distinguish between Muslims who see Islam only as a religion in the universal sense, and those who see it also as a political ideology.

"For example, in Turkey, my country, probably more than 90 per cent of all citizens would identify themselves as Muslim. But, as polls show, only 10-15pc of Turks want an 'Islamic state' instead of the existing secular state. They are often called — and they call themselves — 'Islamists' (in Turkish, "İslamçı") [pronounced 'Islamchi'].

"Are Islamists violent? Most of them aren't. They want to come to power by non-violent political means. But some are violent. That is why it is fair to speak of 'Islamist violence' or 'Islamist terrorism'. But that would not be 'Islamic terrorism', because it is wrong to say Islam as a religion justifies or encourages terrorism." (Akyol, a senior fellow at the Washington-based Cato Institute, focusing on Islam and modernity, asks me to give him "salaam to beautiful Pakistan".)

Another reader raises a question that I find rather baffling. He wants "transparency" in *Dawn's* editorial writing. How come? He says he has looked into the working of some international newspapers where a discussion "within an editorial desk takes place". Also, their websites show "the names and backgrounds" of their leader writers, and he regretted he didn't find "the same transparency" in *Dawn*. He hoped this paper too would one day have "a structured and methodological approach towards editorial writing".

Dear reader, the newspapers you refer to give not only the academic and professional

backgrounds of their leader writers, their websites even display their photographs, which are, of course, good to look at. But should *Dawn* go for this blatant projection of its leader writers? If quality were synonymous with pix and bios, our TV talk shows would stand on a high intellectual pedestal. *Dawn* speaks for itself.

Traditionally, *Dawn* editors and leader writers have chosen to remain unseen. What matters is their competence, diligence and, more important, courage. If a discussion were not to go into the contents of an editorial, what else would — pesky government 'advice'? A chilling threat from terrorists? A narrow commercial outlook? Or an editorial anarchy in which every leader writer would be on his or her own? Ultimately, it is the editor who is ethically and morally responsible for the editorial, for his name is there on the print line.

The editor is not a polymath, could go wrong and needs his colleagues' input at the brainstorming session that consumes 60 to

Without
our
morning
conference,
Dawn
would be
nowhere.

90 minutes of our time daily. Without this confab, no editorial could be conceptualised. Even on issues where no two opinions exist, you are sometimes confounded. Yes, we are categorically for a sovereign Palestinian state, but what happens when Palestinians themselves

fall out — as Fatah and Hamas do? Or what do we write on the complex Yemen conflict? Emotive issues like these can only be decided by discussions where it is not unusual for adrenaline to shoot. To recap: without the morning conference tea, we would be nowhere. As they say, when several minds meet, a master mind comes into being. Statecraft or editorialising becomes a rudderless ship without a master mind.

Now here is a reader objecting to the Gambols cartoon. She finds it "totally out of sync with the times. It is sexist, and horribly demeaning to women. I am surprised that no one has brought this up as yet."

Dear reader: I too have been seeing this cartoon, as you say, "as long as I can remember" both as a reader and staff member, but I have never come across any criticism of this innocuous strip. It is true it shows British culture, but its jokes have a universal appeal. Nevertheless, you have made us think. ■

The writer is Dawn's readers' editor and an author.

GIDC ordinance withdrawal

AFTER approving the draft of the Gas Infrastructure Development Cess amendment ordinance in a cabinet meeting, then sending it to the president for signature, the prime minister decided on Monday to “take notice” of the benefit that might accrue to various large stakeholders because of the ordinance, and announced on Wednesday that he was withdrawing it altogether. The whole matter now reverts back to the status quo, with the GIDC law before the courts, various stay orders in place, while farmers and power consumers continue to pay the cess which in some cases is being deposited with the government and in other cases being retained by the producers pending the court decision. In short, we now have an even bigger mess on our hands, because the government’s weakness has been exposed and those contesting the cess in the courts have smelled blood.

The reasoning behind the ordinance is sound, but the route of taking a presidential ordinance to legislate the amendments is problematic. Pragmatism suggests that it is better to break the impasse that has developed around the issue of the GIDC rather than let the issue fester in the courts. Prime Minister Imran Khan has now tasked his attorney general to “move an application for urgent hearing in the Supreme Court”. He also seeks to “inform the nation that going to the courts carries a risk” because the decision could result in no revenue collection at all (as opposed to the approximately Rs220bn the government would have collected under the deal it had offered to industry through the ordinance). Or worse, it could result in the courts giving a verdict that the cess should never have been levied in the first place and all funds collected under it must be returned. That could saddle the government with reimbursement obligations of almost Rs295bn, according to Mr Khan’s own communication.

The reminder of the risks involved in reverting to the status quo should not be directed at “the nation” since the decision has been made by the prime minister and nobody else. The risk is his to bear, not that of “the nation”. It is not clear on whose advice Mr Khan has acted in reversing his own decision, and whether adverse commentary on TV played a role in swaying his mind, but “the nation” should not be blamed for this. Leadership involves taking responsibility for one’s own decisions, and bearing their consequences. With this style of governance, vacillating and fearful, one is left wondering how the government intends to implement the “tough choices” that have to be made to successfully see the IMF programme through. We are only two months into that programme, and already significant doubts about the seriousness at play are taking root.

By ordinance alone

THE opposition has once again slammed the government over its preoccupation with ruling by ordinances. In the latest instance, the opposition members were up in arms in protest when four ordinances, promulgated by President Arif Alvi, came before the Senate on Tuesday. The controversial GIDC ordinance was not among them, but the omission did little to contain the opposition members. The treasury was severely castigated for bypassing parliament, the protest being backed by a solid argument which termed the bunch of presidential ordinances as unconstitutional. The members duly referred to Article 89 of the Constitution which says the president may promulgate an ordinance, except when the Senate or National Assembly are in session. The Article further says the ordinance shall stand repealed at the expiration of 120 days from its promulgation or, “if before the expiration of that period a resolution disapproving it is passed by the Assembly, upon the passing of that resolution”. The treasury did try to counter this latest attack in the Senate by summoning the old defence. But whereas the point about the opposition’s non-cooperation did make sense, it couldn’t quite dispel the impression that the PTI government was from the outset determined not to ‘unnecessarily’ involve the opposition lawmakers in legislation.

Governments in the past, too, were blamed for resorting to the presidential ordinance. The fundamental question in the present case, however, stems from the ruling party’s obvious contempt for the legislators who occupy the opposition benches. This message is most candidly manifest in the repeated remarks of Prime Minister Imran Khan about the ‘corrupt’ parties and politicians who, regardless of the likes and dislikes of the sitting government, have quite a heavy presence in parliament today. In the Senate in particular, the numbers prevent the PTI government from winning easy passage for any bill it might want to introduce. Hence the reliance on presidential ordinances despite that it has been generally debunked as a dubious means to run the business. The choice of the route is, sadly, hardly surprising after Mr Khan had declared as early as December 2018 — barely a few months into power — that he planned to legislate by ordinance. Entering into a ‘settlement’ with the opposition meant that corruption cases against their leaders should be closed — an option the prime minister ‘would never go for’. A return to the regular route of legislation through parliament will require a basic change in the PM’s position.

Medical waste

WHEN Karachi resident Shaneira Akram went for a morning stroll along the Clifton beach on Tuesday, she was shocked to discover large amounts of medical waste lying around on the sand. Along with heaps of plastic bags and other garbage, the tide had brought with it several blood vials and open syringes to the shoreline. Thanks to her efforts in raising the alarm about the potential public health catastrophe through a series of tweets and videos, the Sindh Police quickly cordoned off the area, while municipal authorities brought in heavy machinery to clean up the site. The beach may have been cleared for now, but the larger issue of Karachi's waste disposal and management cannot be buried so neatly.

According to a report published a day after the heavily publicised incident, the vast majority of healthcare facilities in the city by the sea still do not have the necessary equipment to safely collect and dispose of medical waste. This is an open secret, written about countless times before: hospitals, clinics and maternity centres continue to dump toxic waste in the open, or directly into water bodies, despite being well aware of the danger such actions pose to ordinary citizens. Of course, Karachi is not alone; healthcare facilities across the country engage in similar irresponsible practices. A host of infectious diseases are linked to toxic medical waste, while garbage collectors and scavengers, along with those living close to medical centres, are especially threatened. It is unknown what percentage of the waste actually goes through incinerators, how many of these are even functional, or whether healthcare practitioners are separating highly toxic and non-toxic waste at the source. Answers to these questions are needed, and the provincial government must do more than just "write letters" to hospitals to ensure that proper procedures of waste disposal are being followed. It is nothing short of criminal when those whose duty it is to provide healthcare to the people can so casually and callously toy with it.

Ho Chi Minh is dead

SAIGON: Radio Hanoi announced on Thursday [Sept 4] that Dr Ho Chi Minh, one of the post-war world's greatest leaders, who crushed the French colonials in Indo-China and has fought the United States to a seeming standstill, died on Wednesday at 9.47 a.m. Hanoi time "after a grave and sudden heart attack".

Radio Hanoi announced that a 26-man funeral committee was formed by the Party First Secretary Le Duan. The committee members include besides him, Premier Pham Van Dong and General Vo Nguyen Giap. A communique broadcast by Radio Hanoi said, "Our entire Party and all our forces and people of Viet-Nam shall mourn President Ho Chi Minh for seven days, from Sept 4 to Sept 10." It was not learnt whether the mourning period would include a battle-field ceasefire.

The funeral of President Ho Chi Minh will take place next Wednesday. The date was announced in Paris today by Xuan Thuy, head of the North Vietnamese peace talks delegation, just before he flew off to Hanoi to attend the funeral ceremony.

The Committee's message broadcast after the official announcement of President Ho's death and to the accompaniment of mourning music asked the nation in the temporary absence of a Head of State to follow the policy of the Party Central Committee and the Government. — Agencies

Warning to Indians

LAHORE: The Hon'ble Sardar Rab Nishtar, Minister of Finance, N.-W.F.P. on his return from Delhi said that the Frontier people felt very sore on the questions of inadequate subvention to the Frontier Province from the Central Government.

“The present subvention of Rupees one crore,” he pointed out, “Falls much short even of the recommendation of the N.W.F.P. Subjects Committee set up by the Government of India which recommended a subvention of Rupees one crore and 62 lakhs. It is difficult for us to carry on with the present aid from the Centre. This is far below the needs of the Province which has been separated from the Punjab.”...

Referring to the political situation in the country, Mr. Nishtar who is also a member of the Muslim League Working Committee said: “The people of India must beware of the manoeuvres in certain quarters to torpedo the Gandhi-Jinnah meeting. In the country there is a genuine desire at present for a Congress-League settlement and it is the duty of all freedom loving people to assist the two great leaders in arriving at an agreement. In that agreement lies our hope for the future... — *Dawn Delhi*